

EXHIBIT 2
DATE 1/14/09
HB 229

January 12, 2009
Gary MacLaren
Montana State Capitol
Helena, MT

Re: HB229

Dear Rep. MacLaren:

I am writing at the request of John Susen and affiliates of St. Mary's Mission to reiterate its historic import within the context of Montana's heritage places.

St. Mary's Mission in the Bitterroot Valley is the true cradle of Montana. The valley was first the homeland of generations of Salish. Father Pierre Jean DeSmet established Montana's first permanent settlement there in 1841. While St. Mary's history reaches back to Montana's long-ago past, its historic layers tell an important story. The Salish people who hunted the valley from time immemorial, the Catholic priests who settled there, and the parishioners who later worshipped at St. Mary's are all important chapters of its story. The site also symbolizes the roots of the modern community of Stevensville. It is one of the few places in Montana with such a long, rich, and varied past.

St. Mary's two cemeteries are the final resting places of Salish ancestors and Catholic priests, including the beloved county namesake, Father Anthony Ravalli. These and the fragile built environment, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, provide a unique classroom where cultures can meet, learn to understand their pasts, and prepare one another for tomorrow's challenges.

Sincerely,
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